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## Impact Of Social Media On Adolescent Mental Health: Systematic Review

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### Abstract

The increasing use of social media among adolescents has prompted growing concern over its potential impact on their mental health during a critical developmental period marked by emotional, social, and cognitive changes. Adolescents aged 10 to 19 are particularly vulnerable due to ongoing brain maturation and heightened sensitivity to social feedback. A qualitative research design was used to investigate the impact of the social media on adolescent mental health. Literature referred includes application of Longitudinal Correlational, Causal, Cross-sectional descriptive, inferential design and GHQ-12 scores. This review study revealed that social media use shaped by the context, content and individual differences impacting the mental health of adolescents negatively. Excessive or unregulated use is closely linked with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and social withdrawal.

**Key Words:** Adolescents, Social Media, Mental Health, Depression, Anxiety, Screen Time

### Introduction

Adolescence is a critical stage of life marked by rapid neurological, psychological, and social development. During this period, young people are still developing cognitive abilities, emotional regulation, and resilience skills needed to navigate complex environments (Dong *et al.*, 2023; Lieberman *et al.*, 2011). Because of this ongoing development, adolescents are particularly sensitive to external influences and more vulnerable to experiences that shape their identity, self-esteem, and overall well-being. since adolescence is a time of heightened sensitivity, these developmental changes directly affect how mental health challenges arise and are experienced. Limited emotional maturity and underdeveloped coping strategies can make it difficult for adolescents to manage stress, regulate emotions, and critically evaluate social interactions. As a result, issues such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and behavioural problems often become prominent during this life stage (Abbas *et al.*, 2024; Hussain *et al.*, 2025). When such vulnerabilities interact with demanding social environments, the risk of psychological distress becomes heightened.

One of the most powerful environments shaping adolescent mental health today is social media. Since the 2010s, it has become a central part of adolescent life, transforming how young people communicate, form relationships, and construct identities (Dong *et al.*, 2023; Barry *et al.*, 2023; Yu *et al.*, 2024). While it offers opportunities for connection, self-expression, and access to information, problematic or excessive use has been linked to negative outcomes. Research shows that certain patterns of use such as passive scrolling, upward social comparison, and constant exposure to idealized online images can undermine

self-esteem and contribute to symptoms of depression and anxiety (Yu *et al.*, 2024; Barry *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, reliance on social media during periods of reduced face-to-face interaction, such as school closures, can intensify feelings of isolation and social exclusion (Ninef *et al.*, 2024). In this way, digital environments amplify existing vulnerabilities in adolescents, making mental health impacts more pronounced.

### Aim and Methodology

The aim of the present study was to systematically review existing literature examining the impact of social media on adolescent mental health, with particular emphasis on the nature and type of that impact. A structured search of relevant studies was conducted using Google Scholar, Mendeley, and ResearchGate, focusing exclusively on articles published in English. In total, 25 research studies from different regions of the world were selected for review. All identified articles were independently double-screened by two authors based on their titles and abstracts, followed by a detailed evaluation of their methodological quality, relevance, and alignment with the review objectives. Studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded after initial summary analysis, and full-text articles meeting the criteria were thoroughly examined. The review incorporated studies employing qualitative, longitudinal correlational, causal, cross-sectional descriptive, and inferential research designs, including those utilizing standardized measures such as the GHQ-12. Experimental studies and research involving non-human subjects were excluded. The target population for this review comprised adolescents aged 10 to 19 years, without restrictions related to gender, race, or health status.

### Results

S. No	Title of the study	Author	Sample	Research design	Results & Discussion
1.	The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Mental Health Among Adolescents	Ninef, <i>et al.</i> , SMP Negeri 11, Kupang	Simple Random sampling method was used to select the 100 students from SMP Negeri 11 Kupang (Grades VII–IX)	Qualitative Research Design, Social Media Use Questionnaire was used.	The study found a significant positive correlation between the duration of social media use and mental health issues (anxiety, depression, and stress). 75% of students using social media for more than 4 hours/day showed moderate to high levels of at least one mental health indicator, whereas students using it less than 2 hours/day showed normal to mild levels. Female students showed higher psychological distress, likely due to greater sensitivity to social comparison and online interactions. The study highlights the need for parental and school

					supervision to promote healthy social media habits.
2.	The Longitudinal Impact of Screen Media Activities on Brain Function, Architecture and Mental Health in Early Adolescence	Dong, <i>et al.</i> , The University of Hong Kong	Longitudinal sampling method was used to select the 4557 adolescents (mean age $\approx$ 9.96 years), from the ABCD study, followed over 4 time points (baseline to 3-year follow-up)	Longitudinal Correlational & Causal Research Design using Linear Mixed Models, child behaviour checklist and DSM-oriented and empirically based scales were used.	This study found that excessive screen media activity (SMA) in adolescents is linked to mental health problems such as internalizing (e.g., anxiety, depression), externalizing (e.g., aggression), and stress-related issues. It also showed that high screen use is associated with reduced brain volume. Watching TV was especially linked to externalizing problems, while video watching was linked to all three mental health issues. The findings emphasize the need to monitor adolescents' screen time due to its impact on brain development and mental well-being.
3.	Associations Between Time Spent Using social media and Internalizing and Externalizing Problems Among U.S. Youth	Riehm <i>et al.</i> , United States	Purposive sampling method was used to select 6,595 adolescents aged 12–15 years	Longitudinal Correlational & Causal Research Design were used.	Social media for >3 hours per day had significantly higher odds of mental health problems at follow-up. For internalizing problems, adjusted odds ratio (AOR) = 1.60 (95% CI: 1.45–1.76). For externalizing problems, AOR = 1.48 (95% CI: 1.32–1.66). A clear dose–response relationship was observed, with risk

					<p>increasing as daily usage hours increased. Associations were stronger among female adolescents.</p>
4.	<p>Adolescent Social Media Use and Mental Health from Adolescent and Parent Perspectives</p>	<p>Barry, <i>et al.</i>, Washington State University, USA</p>	<p>Convenience sampling method was used to select 226 participants (113 parent-adolescent dyads); adolescents aged 14–17 from the U.S</p>	<p>Cross-sectional correlational design, Social Media Survey Parent Version, Social Media Survey Adolescent Version were used.</p>	<p>The study found that both parent and adolescent reports of the number of social media accounts were moderately correlated with inattention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), anxiety, and depression symptoms (as per DSM-5), and adolescent-reported FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) and loneliness. Adolescents with a high number of social media accounts and high FoMO levels showed the highest anxiety and depression scores. The findings emphasize the importance of considering both adolescent and parent perspectives and call for longitudinal research to better understand causal relationships.</p>

5.	The Impact of Social Media Use on Mental Health Among Adolescents	Hussain, <i>et al.</i> , Ziauddin University & other institutions	Convenience sampling method was used to select 165 adolescents (aged 18–25) from various institutions.	Cross-sectional survey design. Social Media Use Questionnaire was used.	The study revealed that adolescents using social media for more than 3 hours daily experienced significantly higher levels of depression and anxiety, along with lower self-esteem. Key contributing factors were social comparison and pressure to maintain idealized online personas. The results align with previous literature showing the negative psychological impacts of excessive social media use. The study recommends fostering responsible usage and exploring coping mechanisms to mitigate adverse effects.
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### Conclusion:

Social media has become a vital component of everyday life and is now a cornerstone of adolescent experiences, reshaping how young people connect, build relationships, and shape their sense of self. Its swift incorporation into daily habits, especially in recent years, has sparked significant worries about its possible impact on the mental well-being of adolescents.

- ❖ The review of recent studies reveals that social media use during adolescence has negative effects on mental health, depending on the type of usage, intensity, individual vulnerabilities. Several studies, reported that excessive or unregulated use is closely linked with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and social withdrawal. Passive usage patterns such as scrolling without interaction or engaging in social comparison were particularly associated with negative outcomes. Adolescents are still developing cognitive and emotional regulation skills, making them more vulnerable to the fast-paced, emotionally charged content typical of many social media platforms.
- ❖ At the same time, the reviewed literature highlights the importance of contextual and mediating factors in shaping the impact of social media on adolescent mental health. Parental involvement and differences in adolescents' perceptions of their parents play a significant role in influencing how social media use affects psychological outcomes. Importantly, social media is not inherently harmful; active and meaningful engagement such as communication, collaboration, and maintaining relationships can produce neutral or even beneficial effects. However, environmental

conditions such as limited face-to-face interaction, inadequate emotional support, and culturally specific influences can intensify negative outcomes.

Overall, the relationship between social media use and adolescent mental health is complex, dynamic, and often bidirectional. To reduce potential risks, it is essential to encourage balanced and mindful use, strengthen media literacy, implement culturally responsive interventions, and promote supportive parental guidance. Fostering healthy online behaviors and building emotional resilience among adolescents are crucial steps in safeguarding their psychological well-being in the digital age.

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